

The **Department of Medieval Studies** of Central European University cordially invites you to the public lecture of the Medieval Studies Faculty Research Seminar



# Energy Consumption and the Black Death

**Richard W. Unger**  
University of British Columbia

**3:00 p.m. on May 13, 2016**  
**CEU, Faculty Tower 409**  
**Budapest, V. Nádor u. 9.**  
**Reception to follow**



Herman, Jean and Paul Limbourg. *Les tres riches heures du Duc de Berry, Fevrier (February)*, 1412-16. Manuscript (Ms. 65), Musée Condé, Chantilly

The devastating plagues which swept across Europe in the second half of the fourteenth century took the lives of as many as half the population. Almost all aspects of life felt the impact of the sudden loss in population. With fewer people survivors should have enjoyed a dramatic increase in resources available to each of them. As it turned out and especially over the course of the next one hundred years the results proved considerably less straightforward. The pattern of changes in energy consumption between 1300 and 1450, from before the Black Death to after the waves of disease had ended, indicates some of the varying strategies peoples put in place to take advantage, if at all, of the changed circumstances. Efforts to calculate what happened to total energy use and the shares of different energy carriers indicate that people did have more to work with per person but that the gains were limited and that the ways they used those gains did not necessarily lead to unrestricted improvements in welfare for people or for the environment.

**Richard W. Unger** (PhD, Yale University, 1971) taught medieval and early modern European history at the University of British Columbia where he is now a professor emeritus. He has worked on the history of medieval shipbuilding and beer brewing in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. More recently he has directed research to late medieval cartography and to patterns of energy consumption in medieval Europe and contemporary Canada. Recent publications include *Ships on Maps: Pictures of Power in Renaissance Europe* (2010), (with John Thistle) *Energy Consumption in Canada in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (2013), and edited volumes *Shipping Efficiency and Economic Growth 1350-1850* (2011) and articles on "Trade, Taxation and Government Policy in the High Middle Ages," *Viator*, 46 (2015) and "Commerce, Communication and Empire Economy, Technology and Cultural Encounters," *Speculum*, 90 (2015).